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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON UAE

11. Summary: The Department's Report on Human Rights Practices received prominent media coverage, led by a statement from the UAE Foreign Ministry rejecting the report as failing to portray a comprehensive picture of the UAE and calling the methodology of the report into question. End Summary.

12. Headlines:

-- Dubai-based English daily Khaleej Times (circulation 60,000), headline: "UAE: 'US Rights Report does not portray true picture'."

-- Dubai-based English daily Gulf News (circulation 95,000), headline: "US report has unsubstantiated statements, says UAE Ministry; it does not portray full picture of open society established here"

-- Abu Dhabi-based English daily The National (circulation 65,000), front page: "UAE criticizes human rights report"

-- Abu Dhabi-based Arabic semi-official daily "Al-Ittihad" (circulation 65,000), front-page headline: "In response to US State of Department's report, the UAE confirms its continued pursuit of Human Rights report and calls all concerned parties to commit to scientific and accurate methodology"

-- "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 90,000), headline: "Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 'Those who issue reports should follow an accurate and scientific methodology'"

-- Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 85,000), headline: "Ministry of Foreign Affairs refutes U.S. report on Human Rights in the UAE"

13. Under the headline "America and Human Rights", the 02/28 editorial in "Al-Khaleej" opined:

"People in glass houses should not throw stones at others. Every year, the U.S. issues a Human Rights report, based on an American perspective, in which it convicts each and every country of violating Human Rights and international law principles. How ironic of America to give itself the right to defend Human Rights and freedoms, and to issue certificates of good or bad conduct here and there, while it is America that herself needs a certificate of good conduct in respecting human rights and nations' sovereignties. A

country that practices blind political and military aggression against the world has no right to accuse others of violating human rights. A country that waged a war against Iraq, occupied it, killed and injured Iraqis and displaced millions of them should not put itself in a position of condemning others. A country that supports Zionist aggression and applauds its massacres and holocausts is itself guilty of violating human rights and is an outlaw. The country that built Guantanamo and Abu-Ghraib and other flying and floating prisons where it violated human rights in the worst forms should not be allowed to defend human rights."

¶4. Under the headline "Human Rights in the UAE", Dr. Mohammed Salman Al-Abboudi, UAE University Professor, wrote 03/01 op-ed in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 85,000):

"The UAE announced that it rejects the U.S. Human Rights Report as based on generalized and undocumented statements. This report, even if untrue or exaggerated, negatively impacts our country's reputation. Our country has embraced everyone and given them the opportunity to live in security, something they wouldn't even dream of in their own homelands. Job opportunities have been swept from our citizens' feet and given to those expatriates. We wonder whether human rights organizations have ever analyzed Western companies, the majority of whose employees are Asians and Westerners, and inquired about the rights of UAE employees. [We do not need] this surplus of employees.... Reducing the surplus in employees might also cut down on traffic jams. Who knows? Maybe tomorrow a Human Right organization will demand that our country compensate Asians and Westerners for the psychological effects of traffic and reaching work late!"

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¶5. Under the headline "Missing the Point on Human Rights", Abu Dhabi's semi-official English daily "The National" published the following editorial on 03/01 (circulation not yet measured):

The annual report on human rights by the US State Department contains some negative observations on the UAE. Should we take the report seriously? On the one hand, yes, if only because it is produced by the foreign affairs department of the world's most powerful nation. While it does not determine US policy, its verdict can shape perceptions among leaders and thinkers whose support is vital to our development. But the report, rigidly templated in its methodology, provides no political or social perspective or context, and ignores the tremendous progress made by the UAE in the 37 years of its existence.

It would be hard to find a better example of an inclusive and tolerant society in a region where extremism too often reigns. This is a country going about its business of building institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and embracing diversity. Many of the report's criticisms derive from a western, thoroughly secularised mindset that is unforgiving towards local belief-based customs. Taken against the broad and fruitful backdrop of US-UAE-global relations, this latest report acts as a kind of drive-by, uncontextualised reprimand - patronising and unhelpful.

It would be easy to respond with retorts about Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, rendition and so on: but we would rather ask that these well-meaning researchers in Washington understand that it takes time and commitment to build a culture of human rights, and that here such commitment abounds. Our government is neither ignorant nor dismissive of its obligations. It is precisely to meet international norms and standards that the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, is coordinating a working group on devising strategies and responses. He has briefed and listened to the recommendations of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, noting that this process "has served as an opportunity for us to take into account the progress made and for them to be recognised by the international community, as well as a reminder of our shortcomings and challenges that need our attention in the future".

That is what the report should have considered, but did not.

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